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ABSTRACT

A conceptual analysis deals with the question of what is meant by the term "teaching." In other words, what are the necessary criteria of teaching? Criterion 1 is that there be someone in authority to fulfill the role of the teacher. Criterion 2 insists that someone fulfill the role of pupil. These patently obvious criteria are not sufficient for a definition of teaching. A third criterion is that teacher and pupil be in the proper context, a context of what should be taught. The proper context has the logical organization of subject matter to determine what is to be taught, and the use of a psychological order to determine to whom and when it should be taught. A fourth criterion insists that teaching is goal-oriented. When all the criteria of teaching are met, it is argued, it is logical to assert that learning follows necessarily from teaching. (SLD)

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Teaching: A Conceptual Analysis

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It is generally asserted that "teaching" is a term that has within it a purely descriptive quality. To act as a partial basis for this assertion, "teaching" is often compared with terms such as "indoctrinating" or "propagandizing" or "preaching". It is obvious that these latter terms carry with them a contextual implication which included an expressment of either approval or disapproval. This evaluative aspect distinguishes them from "teaching". For, if teaching is descriptive, then any category dealing with it must always be neutral.

Since descriptive research is sometimes depreciated, perhaps something should be mentioned about it prior to the analysis. When exceptionally little is scientifically known about a phenomenon, the normal way to approach research on it (i.e., the method of investigation) is to observe and analyze the phenomenon itself. These observed segmented movements of teachers constitute an empirical analysis of teaching.

However, an investigative inquiry can be focused at different levels of analysis. The choice of level is dependent upon the purpose. In the current study, a deliberate choice was made as to the level of analysis. It is concerned with the conceptual analysis of teaching. More specifically, the study is an attempt to present a rational reconstruction of the concept of teaching so that it is, hopefully, more suitable for research. As a result of this explication, several implications will be dealt with and one quasi-implication will be alluded to but left "hanging" as a conjecture for another study.

A conceptual analyses deals with the question, "What do we mean when we use the term "teaching?" A concept is a rule of language, and more generally, a rule of human action. The concept of teaching is a vague concept and is enormously complicated, and part of its complication arises for no other reason than it is not precise. (This vagueness is one of the justifications for the descriptive empirical analyses of teaching which were alluded to previously.)

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According to Thomas F. Green, "the concept of teaching is molecular--as an activity teaching can be understood not as a single activity, but as a whole family of activities within which some members appear to be of more significance than others." For instance, consider the relationship between teaching and training - sometimes these terms are exchangeable but they are not identical. Green shows us that training is a part of teaching but appeals to limited intelligence. As training moves away from teaching, it approaches conditioning when in the context of the skill range. Compared with the belief range, indoctrinating and teaching are also closely related but not identical. When indoctrinating moves away from teaching, it becomes propagandizing. There are other related cases that should be considered which Green did not mention. For instance, is counseling therapy or teaching? Is advising telling or teaching? Or do these represent borderline cases of teaching?

This leads us to the question, "What characteristics have to be present for an act to be considered as teaching?" or, stated in a more philosophical tone, "What are the necessary criteria of teaching?" Israel Sheffler provides us with a range definition that deals with the necessary and sufficient conditions of teaching. This type of definition takes account of borderline cases and is used frequently when dealing with vague concepts. It is defining all characteristics, all of which are not necessary but some of which are sufficient.

The following represents an attempt to list the conditions necessary to determine the criteria for teaching. The first two criteria seem to be extremely elementary, however, it is mandatory that they be listed. Criterion (1) insists that there be someone in authority in a specific discipline to fulfill the role of the teacher. Criterion (2) insists that there be someone who is not an authority in the same discipline to audit the teaching and thus fulfill the role of the pupil. With reference to the essential relationship of these criteria, it would be absurd to claim that 'Professor Smith is teaching X' if there were no one there to be taught. Consequently is appears patently obvious that criteria (1) and (2) are necessary for teaching. Nevertheless, they are not sufficient. Even though it is necessary to assert that "Professor Smith is teaching X to Adolph" in order to satisfy the criteria, there are still other aspects that must be taken into consideration for the above assertion to be true.

For instance, it would not be possible for 'Professor Smith to be teaching nuclear physics to Adolph who is in kindergarten'. Considering this aspect, it appears that another

condition need be created. This criterion (3) would insist that both teacher and pupil are in the proper context. Although this criterion is not a part of Sheffler's definition of teaching, the writer feels that it follows logically from criterion (1) and (2). When context is a condition, the overall situation in which the words were uttered must be considered. (i.e., status of the speaker, time it was spoken, setting in which it was spoken, tonal quality of the assertion) It, therefore, becomes necessary to analyze "what is being taught" and "to whom it is being taught" before we can derive the "proper context" in order to satisfy criterion (3).

With reference to 'what is being taught' as a necessary condition for teaching, we are faced with the task of finding or developing a "structure" for the discipline. (i.e., an organization of subject matter). This organization of subject matter can be logical or pseudological. It is logical when the elements of a discipline are related deductively, as they are in mathematics, and in theoretical phases of physics, chemistry and certain other natural sciences.

In other disciplines, however, such as the social sciences, knowledge can be arranged in accordance with what George F. Kneller labels pseudologically. (i.e., in terms of their explanatory power). Each of these disciplines has its nucleus of basic concepts. These concepts are related to other ideas in the sense that they provide the structure of meaning within which deeper concepts can be formulated and understood. The more detailed information of each discipline can then be taught with whichever of these guiding ideas explain it best. The student should learn these ideas first in simplified fashion and should understand them more fully as the student increases knowledge of the discipline.

Having determined a partially justifiable method for deciding "what should be taught'. Robert H. Ennis helps considerably with this problem by introducing what he calls "the proper degree of sophistication". Professor Ennis shows how some explanations in teaching are unsatisfactory because they are not at the appropriate level of sophistication, that is, they are either too simple or too complex for the audience. The major factors to take into consideration when determining the level of sophistication for any given episode are the "degree of abstractness" and the "degree of refinement" of the subject matter.

Both of these factors introduce into the problem of proper context a psychological aspect. For example, both abstractness and refinement infer the concept of readiness. If we are to teach effectively, we must know exactly what cognitive powers the pupil possesses and at what ages he acquires them, otherwise, we may overestimate his capacity for abstract thought. Consequently, our explanation of the subject matter would be too refined, thereby, making any attempt to teach futile.

The most widely accepted account of the intellectual growth of the child and his readiness for abstract teachings is that of Jean Piaget. According to Piaget, the development stages of intelligence are described "as being in constant sequence in every child and that the structural properties which define a given stage must form an integrated whole with the structures defining earlier stages." Eventually, a final intellectual reorganization takes place in the child between the ages of 11 and 15; and, now he is able to deal effectively with both the reality before him (i.e., concrete operations) and also with the world of pure possibility. (i.e., abstract propositional statements) However, from the fact that he is capable of performing the full range of cognitive operations, it does not necessarily follow that he now performs them adequately. All that can be said is that he is capable of learning them. It is extremely important, therefore, to locate precisely which cognitive operations the pupil can perform at each stage in his development and with the corresponding level of sophistication so as to insure that he can be taught.

With the development of a logical organization of subject matter to determine "what is to be taught" and the use of a psychological order to determine "to whom and when it should be taught', it appears that we have satisfied the conditions necessary for the attainment of the proper context. (i.e., criterion "C"). But with the attainment of this criterion, we are led to a rather far reaching implication. Assuming that the proper context is attained (it should be noted that it is not the intent of this paper to determine how to attain this criterion), would there be legitimate grounds to assert that when there is teaching, there must be learning. To restate the implication: In the proper context, would a claim that learning follows necessarily from teaching be defensible? More on this alleged implication later - now, back to the criteria of teaching.

Criterion (4) insists that teaching is goal-oriented. Implicit in any goal-oriented activity is intention. Obviously, the intention of teaching is to produce learning. To insist otherwise would be to refute the claim that one is teaching. Accordingly, for one to be teaching, one must adhere to ethical principles of communication and adopt a reasonable system of actions that is expected to produce learning. This criterion greatly resembles the equivalent definition of teaching as offered by Professor B. O. Smith which states "teaching is a system of actions intended to produce learning." Both criterion (4) and Smith's definition appear to be rather broad. But, when broken down analytically, both seem to be saying that teaching involves action; action involves more than mere physical movement; action involves intention; therefore, teaching is goal-oriented.

One could argue that from the above analysis, it follows necessarily that a mere behavioristic concept of teaching cannot be logically defended. It is also possible to argue that when doing descriptive analysis of teaching, it is necessary to realize that when teaching many actions are taking place, not just mere physical movements. For instance, there are a series of actions that teachers normally perform when they are teaching. These actions are labeled as defining, explaining, opinioning, justifying, and so on. An excellent and comprehensive list of these intellectual acts is provided by B. Paul Komisar in his article entitled, "Teaching Act and Enterprise". It would appear from this that the actions involved in teaching are those that we normally classify as logical relevant actions.

According to G.E.M. Anscombe, "that which distinguishes actions which are intentional from those which are not, is that intentional actions are those to which a certain sense of the questions "Why" is given application." This sense is defined as that in which the answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting. But, this leads us into even muddier waters because the relevant sense of the question 'Why?' and 'What is the meaning of reason for acting, are synonymous. It has been argued frequently that the reason for a physical movement is involuntary. It is a reason as opposed to a cause when the movement is involuntary. It is a reason as opposed to a cause when the movement is voluntary, open to choice, and intentional. This, then, is the aspect which is supposed to differentiate physical movement from action. Accordingly, an action would seem to be a case of behavior which is open to volition, and in which there is rational choice.

However, A.I. Meldon shows us that there are actions in which, either in cause or in actual performance, no rational choice is involved. Consider the many different kind of cases in which it would be true to say that a person could not have done otherwise. One responds to the situation in which one finds oneself almost automatically-forced by habit or guided by rules. Specifically, consider the teacher following the logical rules of communication in the presentation of any logically organized discipline. The teacher presents the discipline according to its structure and geared toward the level of sophistication of the auditors. In essence, the teacher really has no choice at all as to what to teach at that specific time and under those specific conditions. Yet, this is not to deny that teaching is an action. But, it does illustrate another principle that must be considered when differentiating between bodily movement and action. Actions do involve and include cases of non-voluntary behavior, but in these cases understanding of the "proper context is essential for understanding the distinction".

An important implication of the goal-oriented action concept of teaching is that this specific aspect may make descriptive analysis of teaching forfeit their priority position on the hierarchical scale of types of analysis. The writer is referring to the Philosophical analysis of a human action that has been inadequate and confusing because actions have been traditionally regarded as descriptive whereas their principle function is ascriptive, quite literally, to ascribe responsibility for actions. This is the quasi-implication that the writer said would be alluded to but not dealt with in any depth. It might be deserving of further inquiry but for our purposes, there are only two aspects of it that are relevant.

Ascriptive analyses are concerned with the assessment of responsibility and the future consequences of a specific action. For example, a certain state of affairs exists; then the action occurs; and, then a different state of affairs. The person responsible for the latter state of affairs is the person whose intentions, habits or rules gave him reason to "act" or "caused" him to perform the action. Applying this to actions which meet the criteria of teaching would give us the following analogy:

(a) a certain state of affairs exists could be equated with "some person not knowing the meaning of X".

(b) then, the action could be equated as "teaching within the proper context".

(c) and, then a different state of affairs could be equated with "the same person mentioned in (a) knows the meaning of X".

Consequently, if the above analysis is correct, in an ascriptive sense- the consequence of teaching is learning. Ascriptively speaking, the teacher is the performer of the actions that created the learning and is therefore responsible. This is much too complex of an idea for it to be simply asserted. However, it was mentioned only to assist in establishing what will be the conclusion of this study.

Earlier in this paper, an implication was asserted. Namely, if all the criteria of teaching were fulfilled, would there be legitimate grounds to assert that learning follows necessarily from teaching? This implication placed an especially heavy emphasis upon criterion (3) i.e., proper context. The answer to the question, in the opinion of the writer, is yes! To act as evidence for this affirmative answer, the writer refers to B. Paul Komisar who insists that teaching implies immediate awareness. Professor Komisar states, "For it follows that success in performing the act of teaching requires success in bringing about the appropriate kind of immediate awareness...exemplifying an idea for a student requires that the student recognize something as illustrating the idea."

Thus, according to Professor Komisar, the concept of teaching does not imply learning; however, successful performance of actions that meet the criteria of teaching does imply immediate awareness. But, is there anything pedagogically wrong with classifying "immediate awareness" as another "sense of learn"? The writer thinks not. And, if correct, then the old slogan "If the student isn't learning, then the teacher isn't teaching" becomes a significant condition for denying that the activities of the "teacher were synonymous with the activities of teaching".

Endnotes

1. Thomas F. Green: "A Topology of the Teaching Concept," Studies in Philosophy and Education, Winter (1974-75), p. 282.

2. Green: Ibid., p. 282 et passim.

3. Israel Sheffler: The Language of Education. (Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Illinois, 1984) Chapter III, p. 61-76.

4. George F. Kneller: Logic and Language of Education. (John W. Wiley, Inc., New York, 1986) p. 71.

5. Robert H. Ennis: Logic in Teaching. "Explanation". (Chapter 16) p. 9.

6. Robert H. Ennis: Ibid.

7. Robert H. Ennis: Ibid.

8. Jean Piaget: The Psychology of Intelligence. (Basic Books, New York City, New York, 1957) p. 127.

9. Smith and Ennis, Editors: Language and Concepts of Education. "The Concept of Teaching". B.O. Smith. (Rand-McNally, Chicago, Illinois, 1981) p. 86.

10. B. Paul Komisar: "Teaching: Act and Enterprise". The High School Journal. October, 1976. P. 5.

11. Donald F. Gustafson, Editor: Philosophical Psychology. "Intention". G.E.M. Anscombe. (Doubleday and Company, New York, 1964). p. 31.

12. Anscombe: Ibid.

13. Donald F. Gustafson: Op. Cit. A.I. Meldon. "Action". pp. 58-71.

14. Donald F. Gustafson: Ibid. p. 70.

15. Anthony Flew, Editor: Logic and Language, "The Ascription of Responsibility and Rights". H.L.A. Hart. (Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1965) p. 151

16. B. Paul Komisar: Op. Cit. p.8.